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ABSTRACT

Research consulting services provided by an operational research and services unit of the College of Education at Memphis State University are described. The university is comprehensive, multi-purpose, public, and urban. Of concern are activities of the unit's professional staff that involve application of research-related expertise to perform assigned responsibilities. Attention is directed to the history and purpose of the unit, clientele and services, support personnel and facilities, contributions, and challenges. The primary target population of the Bureau of Educational Research and Services consists of faculty who are involved in research and development. In addition to informing College of Education faculty about external funding and university research grants, direct services are offered, including training in proposal writing and conducting special studies. Assistance is also given to other university units through consultation and conducting research. Bureau staff have also been involved in conducting and assisting with projects for external agencies, including school districts, and state and federal education agencies. Contractual activities have included needs assessments, district-wide surveys, project evaluations, test development, and staff training. (SW)

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A COLLEGE-BASED RESEARCH AND SERVICES UNIT:

ONE FACE OF RESEARCH CONSULTING IN UNIVERSITIES

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present information on research consulting services provided by an operational research and services unit of a college within a comprehensive, multi-purpose, public, urban university. Research consulting services are defined for this presentation as encompassing all activities of the unit's professional staff that involve application of research-related expertise to perform assigned responsibilities. The paper will cover the history and purpose of the unit, clientele and services, support personnel and facilities, contributions, and challenges to be met.

History and Purpose

The Bureau of Educational Research and Services at Memphis State University was established in 1965 to serve primarily as a catalyst for the promotion of research and development activities and to coordinate field services in the College of Education. The Bureau serves as the coordinating unit of the College for many types of faculty activities that are university supported and externally funded. It functions as a college-level sponsored programs office in that all proposals submitted to external funding sources by College of Education faculty members must be processed through the Bureau for review and approval.

The professional staff of the Bureau has remained relatively stable with three faculty members having a major

time assignment to its functions throughout most of its history. These faculty members hold academic rank in departments of the college, teach courses in their respective departments, serve on graduate advisory committees, and provide services within and outside the University. In addition to serving in coordinating and consulting roles, these professional personnel also direct externally funded contractual activities.

Institutionally budgeted funds ensure the continued operation of the Bureau to fulfill its responsibilities to faculty members, the College, and the University. The services provided within the University are available without cost to the recipient on a request basis. The externally funded activities conducted by the Bureau staff are performed on a cost-recovery basis for contracting agencies. The cost for conducting these activities includes an indirect cost factor unless prohibited by the policies or regulations of the contracting entity. The professional staff members of the Bureau are expected to generate partial salary recovery through externally funded activities.

Clientele and Services

The Bureau serves a broad-based clientele through its diverse functions. The primary target population consists of all faculty members within the College who may conduct unsponsored and/or sponsored research and development activities. The professional staff occasionally receives a request from administrative officials of the University to

consult with faculty members or to conduct research projects for academic units outside the College. The clientele of the Bureau also include external agencies for which a variety of research, program development, training, and evaluation projects have been conducted over the years.

Services to College Clientele

The services provided to the faculty members from the College of Education in promoting research and development activities are diversified in substance and time requirements. At an informational level, Bureau staff monitor, procure, and distribute requests for proposals and program announcements from external funding agencies to department chairs and individual faculty members. Information is also made available concerning the Faculty Research Grants Program funded by the University. The College of Education Research Council, chaired by a Bureau staff member, is used as a vehicle for disseminating information on funding opportunities to the faculty through departmental representatives who serve on the council. A newsletter containing information on external funding opportunities is also published twice per month and distributed to faculty members in the College.

Direct services are delivered upon request to college faculty members in the preparation and submission of project proposals as well as the administration of funded activities. The preparation services may be provided in many forms, such as working with one or several faculty members in the development of a proposal, functioning as a team member who

is responsible for preparing one or more proposal components, assisting in the preparation of a budget for a proposal, advising on particular components or procedures in a proposal, or providing word processing services for typing a proposal. Assistance in the submission of proposals typically involves guidance on procedures for institutional approval at various levels before proposal submission and duplication services for preparation of multiple copies of proposals. Administrative services provided most often to faculty members who have not previously directed externally funded projects generally involve guidance on budget-related matters (e.g., personnel transactions, travel expenses, and operational support expenditures) and administrative functions concerned with performance of the project tasks.

Training in proposal writing has been an important function of the Bureau over the years. With few exceptions, the Bureau has conducted annual proposal writing workshops for College faculty members. Some workshops have covered general strategies in writing proposals for submission to any funding source. Other workshops have focused on particular components of proposals or requirements for specific types of funding sources, such as foundations. Training in proposal writing has been provided to colleges in the Mid-South area on occasion and to institutions outside the local area upon request.

The staff members of the Bureau are involved periodically in research and development activities for the

College of Education. These activities have focused on areas such as new or adapted teacher education programs, evaluation of special programs and projects, and management concerns in the College. Bureau personnel typically are assigned to direct these special studies for the College and report directly to a college-level administrator.

Services to University Clientele

Involvement of Bureau personnel in research activities within the University outside the College of Education is initiated by requests from University administrators to the Dean. Such requests may be limited to assistance only in the design of a study for another University unit to conduct. On some occasions, the request may be to design and conduct a study for another operational unit or a special program within the University. These activities have been few in number over the years but represent one dimension of the services provided by the Bureau.

Bureau staff have opportunities at times to participate in the formulation of University policies on research and the administration of university-based research efforts. As the chair of a sub-committee of the University Council on Graduate Studies and Research, a staff member was instrumental in preparing a statement of research goals for the University. Bureau personnel have served on the Faculty Research Grants Committee with responsibility to review proposals, recommend action on proposals, make suggestions on administrative procedures for the Faculty Research Grants

Program, and assist in the selection of university researchers for special recognition.

Services to External Agency Clientele

Since the establishment of the Bureau, its staff members have been involved continuously in conducting and assisting with projects for external agencies. These projects have been conducted under contracts primarily with local, state, and federal agencies. The agencies include local school districts, state education agencies, higher education institutions, federal education agencies, and military service organizations.

Contractual activities with local school districts have included assessment of specific needs, district-wide surveys, project evaluations, test development, research on staff, and staff training. State agency projects have involved test validation studies, evaluation model development, vocational education articulation, educational television utilization, and management information requirements. Projects conducted for higher education institutions have encompassed program evaluation, faculty improvement, and institutional consulting services. Federal and military agencies have contracted for professional and paraprofessional training, undergraduate research training, curriculum development for training programs, research on instructional delivery systems, and staff expertise for program management.

Support Personnel and Facilities

The support personnel of the Bureau consist of secretarial staff, graduate assistants, and undergraduate student employees. The secretarial personnel provide a variety of project support services for Bureau staff and College of Education faculty members. Their services include typing proposals and forms for submission, completing forms for transactions in project operations, handling financial documents and reports on projects, and producing written reports to funding agencies. Graduate assistants perform project functions under the supervision of professional staff who are involved in proposal preparation and project operations. Undergraduate student employees are assigned tasks that are required in routine proposal production and project operations.

Internally, the Bureau is equipped to provide several support services. Available equipment includes a word processor, a microcomputer with word processing and data analysis capabilities, and duplicators for mimeograph and copier quality reproduction. Telephone service for long distance calls to funding agencies is also available to faculty members. The Bureau obtains services from the word processing center of the University if the need for such services cannot be provided internally. Library resources available in the Bureau include reference materials on research methodology, proposal preparation, sample proposals, and external funding sources.

Contributions

The Bureau has made major contributions to the achievement of the research component of the University's mission since 1965. The professional staff members of the Bureau give highest priority to efforts that promote research and development activities within the College of Education. These efforts focus on (1) informing faculty members about funding opportunities for sponsored activities through a variety of information dissemination methods, (2) providing services and assistance for proposal preparation, and (3) training faculty members in proposal writing. Research activities conducted in the College of Education by Bureau staff provide opportunities for interaction with colleagues and enlistment of their participation in such activities.

At the University level, Bureau staff members give assistance to other units through consultation and conduct of research activities. Opportunities have also been provided to participate in the formulation of research policy, the utilization of University funds for unsponsored research, and the recognition of outstanding researchers. Although limited in scope and magnitude, such involvement is important in gaining recognition for the research efforts in the College of Education.

The participation of Bureau staff in externally funded activities has been beneficial in several ways. These projects have enabled the Bureau staff members to apply their expertise to address educational and training needs in a

variety of contexts. Opportunities have also been provided to involve other faculty members in sponsored activities. The credentials and credibility needed for the Bureau staff to work effectively with colleagues have been enhanced through such involvement. Furthermore, the direction of these projects has required that the Bureau staff maintain current knowledge of the institutional policies and procedures applicable to sponsored activities, thereby having the knowledge needed to work with colleagues in proposal preparation and project administration. Graduate students who participate in these projects receive benefits from the opportunities to learn and apply research techniques. The University gains recognition from funding agencies through the sponsored activities conducted by the Bureau staff.

Continuing Challenges

The major challenge faced by the Bureau staff is to increase the participation of College of Education faculty members in research and development activities, both sponsored and unsponsored. As is characteristic of many colleges and universities, a small percentage of the College of Education faculty conducts most sponsored activities. Involvement of more faculty members in research can be expected as the College and University continue to increase the emphasis on research productivity in awarding tenure, academic promotion, and salary increments. The establishment of a state-funded center of excellence for teacher education

in the College of Education in 1985 is also a potential stimulus for increased research productivity.

Another challenge in recent years has been to maintain previously attained levels of funding from external sources. This challenge has been precipitated largely by changes in research funding levels and priorities among federal agencies. These changes have necessitated the pursuit of more funding from other sources, such as foundations and state agencies.

The Bureau has experienced success in fulfilling its stated purpose during the last 20 years. Although the level of accomplishment does not meet the aspirations of the Bureau's staff, significant impact is observable within and outside the College of Education. The commitment of the staff members to continue their efforts toward achieving the purpose of the Bureau portend further advancement of research and development activities among College of Education faculty members in the years ahead.